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JUNE MEETING

THE stated meeting was held on Thursday, the 9th instant, at three o'clock, P. M.; the PRESIDENT in the chair.

The record of the last meeting was read and approved; and the Librarian read the list of donors to the Library during the last month.

Mr. NORCROSS for the Corresponding Secretary reported the receipt of a letter from Henry M. Lovering, of Taunton, accepting his election as a Resident Member of the Society.

The Cabinet-Keeper reported the gift by the National Battlefields Commission, of Canada, of a bronze medal struck to commemorate the tercentenary of the founding of Quebec by Champlain.

The Treasurer reported the receipt of a check for five thousand dollars from Mr. HUNNEWELL, and it was

Voted, That the Society gratefully acknowledge the generous gift of Mr. James F. Hunnewell, a Resident Member, of five thousand dollars, and the same be accepted and established as the "Hunnewell Fund," the income, in accordance with the provisions of the gift, to be used in the purchase of the "rarer books needed for the Society's Library," and that if at a future date some of Mr. Hunnewell's books come to the Society, the income of the Fund can be used for binding or repair of the same, or obtaining books to supply deficiencies.

The PRESIDENT announced the death of Goldwin Smith, an Honorary Member of the Society, and stated that at the October meeting notice will be taken of his important influence on public opinion in England with reference to the American Civil War.

Edward Waldo Emerson of Concord, was elected a Resident Member of the Society.

Mr. DAVIS presented to the Society copies of photographs taken at the laying of the corner-stone of the building of the American Antiquarian Society, on October 20, 1909.

In submitting a paper on the situation in Washington before

the first inauguration of Lincoln, written at the time by Henry Adams, the PRESIDENT said :

My brother, Henry Adams, an Honorary Member of the Society, sailed for Europe on the first day of May, 1861, accompanying my father, then recently appointed our representative at the Court of St. James. Three days before sailing, he sent me the manuscript I now submit.

Its history is, briefly, as follows: Immediately after being graduated from Harvard, in the Class of 1858, Mr. Adams went to Europe, there to pursue certain studies. Coming home in the autumn of 1860, he had passed the following winter (1860-61) in Washington, acting as secretary to his father, then a Representative in Congress from Massachusetts. This, it will be remembered, was the second session of the Thirty-sixth Congress, — that Congress the term of which expired March 4, 1861, the day of the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. While in Washington, Mr. Adams naturally was a close observer of events which, leading, as they did, to the outbreak of the Civil War, were, as every one knows, of intense interest. This paper when sent to me was accompanied by a note in which Mr. Adams expressed himself as dissatisfied with it. He wrote: "As you will see on reading it over, it is not worth printing. If it had been I should have given it to you before. But finding that it was not going to be a success, I just finished it and laid it by, thinking that though as a whole it is a failure, there are still parts of it which might be put to some use. If you ever feel like taking the labor necessary to rewriting it at more length and in a better form, you are welcome to all the honor you can get from the result."

Mr. Adams was in Europe, acting as his father's private secretary, during the whole period of the latter's residence in London. He returned to America in May, 1868, three years after the close of the War of Secession. I somewhat question whether he then remembered ever having written such a paper, much less the disposition at the time made of it. For myself, I cannot now recall whether I then even read it. It was a period of great excitement, and I seem to have put the manuscript away among my papers; indeed, it is now in some degree matter of fair surprise that it

was preserved at all; for a few months later, toward the close of 1861, I went into the army, and during the next five years was away from Boston. What became of my papers during that period I do not now know. They took their chance.

Some years since, when preparing the Memoir of my father published in the American Statesmen series, I came across this ante-bellum effort of my brother's, and then read it; but made no use of it. It subsequently disappeared; and, a year or so back when I again wanted it, because of a vague recollection of certain statements in it, the most careful search revealed no trace of it. I gave it up for lost; but, some ten days or two weeks ago, when looking for a cover to hold copy, I took one down, apparently empty, from a shelf, and, to my surprise, in it I found the missing manuscript. Reading it over, I was much struck both by its interest and its historical value. Written by a man then just entering on his twenty-third year, and now read, after an interval of close upon half a century, by a man who had just closed his seventy-fifth year, the paper impressed me in an altogether different way from that in which it seems to have impressed the writer at the time of its composition. Seen through the vista of half a century, it revealed a maturity and an insight which I had not at all appreciated on the previous reading. I, therefore, taking advantage of the free hand given me in the extract from Mr. Adams's letter of transmission, from which I have quoted, now propose to incorporate this paper in the Proceedings of the Society.

Before doing so, however, I have something further to say. Mr. Adams has since, in a privately printed volume entitled "The Education of Henry Adams," expressed his more mature conclusions as to what he heard and saw in Washington during the memorable winter described in this paper. Before submitting his earlier account of what then occurred, I give the following extracts from his later narrative, printed in 1907. As respects the sequence of events, it is merely necessary for me further to premise that Mr. Adams had reached Boston in October, 1860; and that he went to Washington, in company with other members of his father's family, arriving there December 1 of the same year, only three weeks after the election of President Lincoln. Congress met two days later,

December 3. His father was nominated to the English Mission by President Lincoln March 18 following, and sailed from Boston on the Cunard steamer, *Canada*, on the 1st of the following May.

Writing forty-seven years later of the educational experience he then went through, Mr. Adams says:

The government had an air of social instability and incompleteness that went far to support the right of secession in theory as in fact; but right or wrong, secession was likely to be easy where there was so little to secede from. The Union was a sentiment, but not much more, and in December, 1860, the sentiment about the Capitol was chiefly hostile, so far as it made itself felt. . . .

Patriotism ended by throwing a halo over the Continental Congress, but over the close of the Thirty-sixth Congress in 1860-61, no halo could be thrown by any one who saw it. . . .

The southern secessionists were certainly unbalanced in mind, — fit for medical treatment, like other victims of hallucination, — haunted by suspicion, by *idées fixes*, by violent morbid excitement; but this was not all. They were stupendously ignorant of the world. As a class, the cotton-planters were mentally one-sided, ill-balanced and provincial to a degree rarely known. They were a close society on whom the new fountains of power had poured a stream of wealth and slaves that acted like oil on flame. . . .

This might be a commonplace of 1900, but in 1860 it was paradox. The southern statesmen were regarded as standards of statesmanship, and such standards barred education. Charles Sumner's chief offence was his insistence on southern ignorance, and he stood a living proof of it. . . .

The southern type was one to be avoided; the New England type was oneself. It had nothing to show except one's own features. Setting aside Charles Sumner, who stood quite alone, all the New Englanders were sane and steady men, well-balanced, educated and free from meanness or intrigue, — men whom one liked to act with, and who, whether graduates or not, bore the stamp of Harvard College. Anson Burlingame was one exception, and perhaps Israel Washburn another; but as a rule the New Englander's strength was his poise which almost amounted to a defect. He offered no more target for love than for hate; he attracted as little as he repelled; even as a machine, his motion seemed never accelerated. . . .

Study it as one might, the hope of education, till the arrival of the President-elect, narrowed itself to the possible influence of only two men — Sumner and Seward.

Sumner was then fifty years old. Since his election as senator in

1851 he had passed beyond the reach of his boy friend, and, after his Brooks injuries, his nervous system never quite recovered its tone; but perhaps eight or ten years of solitary existence as senator had most to do with his development. No man, however strong, can serve ten years as school-master, priest or senator, and remain fit for anything else. All the dogmatic stations in life have the effect of fixing a certain stiffness of attitude forever, as though they mesmerized the subject. Yet even among senators there were degrees in dogmatism, from the frank South Carolinian brutality, to that of Webster, Benton, Clay or Sumner himself, until in extreme cases, like Conkling, it became Shakespearian and *bouffe* — as Godkin used to call it, — like Malvolio. Sumner had become dogmatic like the rest, but he had at least the merit of qualities that warranted dogmatism. He justly thought, as Webster had thought before him, that his great services and sacrifices, his superiority in education, his oratorical power, his political experience, his representative character at the head of the whole New England contingent, and, above all, his knowledge of the world, made him the most important member of the Senate; and no senator had ever saturated himself more thoroughly with the spirit and temper of the body.

Although the Senate is much given to admiring in its members a superiority less obvious or quite invisible to outsiders, one senator seldom proclaims his own inferiority to another, and still more seldom likes to be told of it. Even the greatest senators seemed to inspire little personal affection in each other, and betrayed none at all. Sumner had a number of rivals who held his judgment in no high esteem, and one of these was Senator Seward. The two men would have disliked each other by instinct had they lived in different planets. Each was created only for exasperating the other; the virtues of one were the faults of his rival, until no good quality seemed to remain of either. . . .

A slouching, slender figure; a head like a wise macaw; a beaked nose; shaggy eyebrows; unordered hair and clothes; hoarse voice; off-hand manner; free talk, and perpetual cigar, offered a new type, — of western New York, — to fathom; a type in one way simple because it was only double; — political and personal; but complex because the political had become nature, and no one could tell which was the mask and which the features. At table, among friends, Mr. Seward threw off restraint, or seemed to throw it off, in reality, while in the world he threw it off, like a politician, for effect. In both cases he chose to appear as a free talker, who loathed pomposity and enjoyed a joke; but how much was nature and how much was mask, he was himself too simple a nature to know. Underneath the surface he was conventional after the conventions of western New York and Albany. . . .

Rightly or wrongly the new President and his chief advisers in

Washington decided that, before they could administer the government, they must make sure of a government to administer, and that this chance depended on the action of Virginia. The whole ascendancy of the winter wavered between the effort of the cotton States to drag Virginia out, and the effort of the new President to keep Virginia in. Governor Seward representing the administration in the Senate took the lead; Mr. Adams took the lead in the House; and as far as a private secretary knew, the party united on its tactics. In offering concessions to the border States, they had to run the risk, or incur the certainty of dividing their own party, and they took this risk with open eyes. As Seward himself, in his gruff way, said at dinner, after Mr. Adams and he had made their speeches: — "If there's no secession now, you and I are ruined." . . .

The sudden arrival of Mr. Lincoln in Washington on February 23, and the language of his inaugural address, were the final term of the winter's tactics.

Thus premising, I now submit the following on the same topics, written contemporaneously with the events referred to:

THE GREAT SECESSION WINTER OF 1860-61.

When Congress met at the beginning of December the country was in a condition of utter disorganization. A new question had been sprung upon it before men had had time to discover where they stood, or what the danger really was, or indeed whether any real danger in fact existed. In the extreme North the belief was general that the whole trouble was only sheer panic, which would be short-lived as it was violent, and it is no fair reproach to any good Republican that he should not have believed it possible for any body of reasoning men to take so wild and suicidal a course as that of the southern secessionists. In the middle States, however, there was great alarm. They knew their neighbors better. And as one passed southward, there could be no longer any doubt that the danger was real. The whole country was frantic in its coarse and drunken way with what it called its wrongs, and intoxicated with the prospect of the new Confederacy which was to be founded on slave labor and to draw its wealth from its harvests of cotton. In the city of Washington there was a strange and bewildering chaos, the fragments of broken parties and a tottering Government.

Between the quiet New Englanders with their staid and Puritanical ideas of duty and right, of law and religion, and the rough representatives of the Northwest, who swore by everything in the Heavens above and the Earth beneath that they would turn the rebel States into a wilderness, the difference of manner and idea was great enough. But the southerners were beyond all imagination demented. The more moderate, or the more astute, who followed the footsteps of the Virginia leaders, men like Senator Mason¹ and his colleague,² and Mr. Breckinridge, were all agog with the idea of a dissolution and a reconstruction of the Union with the anti-slavery element left out. But those from the cotton States abandoned at once all thought of uniting themselves again with the cold and repulsive North, and turned their minds from the recollection of their temporary alliance with barren New England, and degrading free labor, to the contemplation of fancies which were oriental in their magnificence. They talked enthusiastically of the new nation which was to be formed about the Gulf of Mexico, which should excel in its splendor and gorgeousness all those which had in old times made the Mediterranean the light of the world. In comparison with this the northern States would remain in a gloomy insignificance. Syria and Egypt, Carthage and Rome, Athens and Constantinople were to come to life again around the shores of the western Mediterranean; the commerce and wealth of Asia and Europe were to flow without an effort into this, their natural harbor; and the delights of the highest civilization were to be added to the luxuries of their tropical climate. It was useless to argue with men mad with such ideas; but so confident were they of their success, that they even met with open arms their old enemies, the Republicans, as men from whom they wished to part in kindness now that the time of separation had come.

Full of these various elements, mixed up in strange confusion, Congress came together. The crowds that for the first few days came up to the Capitol expecting to see some violent and probably bloody explosion, were disappointed and soon became thinner. The business of the country was taken up and continued with more than the usual quiet and industry, and except for the vagaries of some southern Senator there

¹ James M. Mason.

² Robert M. T. Hunter.

was little to see or hear. The field of action was at that time not in Congress but in the Cabinet. There the Union and Disunion parties were struggling for the control, and until that battle was decided, Congress could only look on. No party was disposed to hurry matters, for in spite of all their preparation, the explosion found the South unprepared for it as well as the North, and both sections stood in need of organization. Accordingly, instead of the theatrical and violent scenes and debates that had been expected, the House contented itself with referring the whole question of the national troubles to a large Committee,¹ and until the appropriation bills were passed and the session nearly half over, no general debate was permitted. In the Senate, where there is seldom life enough to stir up the languid atmosphere, the debate which could not be suppressed had little effect. Other events threw for a time the proceedings of Congress into the shade.

Meanwhile the whole nation was clamoring that something must be done; but at least in the city of Washington it seemed fairly agreed that nothing could be done at all. Through the whole month of December the panic there was terrible and always increasing. The rumors from the southern States were enough alone to create very great alarm, but that was not the greatest trouble. The greatest danger was in the Government itself, and so long as the disunionists had the control there, everything was to be feared. It was well known that three of the Cabinet officers were disunionists, and that the President was under their influence. It was known to be their policy to keep him so, and it was said that they had placed him under a system of actual surveillance, so that he never was out of their sight. Visitors at the White House found him regularly hemmed in by these men, who poured into his ear all sorts of prayers and threats. On one side they besought him as a patriot and a Christian to avert the danger of civil war, and on the other warned him that a single step would bring on the most horrible calamities and blast his name as well as the country's happiness forever. He was threatened with assassination till he was said actually to believe that it would come if he moved a step from his position. But no sooner had the South by these means wrung

¹ December 4, 1860. — Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2d session, 6, 22. Charles Francis Adams was a member of this Committee.

from him some concession, than the North howled itself hoarse with execrations, and seized on the vacillating old man with a bitterness that made him aghast. Men high in station made no scruple of remonstrating in a most outspoken way, and with gestures that looked very like shaking their fists in his face. They held impeachment over him, and even went so far as to initiate the first steps toward it. Under these threats the President again wavered toward the northern side and allowed his former concessions to be wrung out of his hands. In this way he remained for months in a position that would have been ludicrous if it had not been tragical. It was a battle after the Homeric style. Mr. Cass and the North dragged him by the foot; Mr. Cobb and the South by the head, and between impeachment and assassination, the feeble object of the furious contest could only weep with his ancient friends, and call upon the people to fast and pray.

While the result was as yet doubtful, and the disunionists still had practically the control of the Government, the news came of the action of Major Anderson. This cut the knot of the difficulty, and gave the whole contest another aspect. Unable longer to resist the pressure, the President threw himself with all the energy of which he was capable, on the side of the Government, and the disunionists one after another were forced out of the Cabinet. To make their departure still more disgraceful, the discovery of a fraud in the Interior Department was made, and it was said at the time, that when the President received the new blow, he broke out into ejaculations much more energetic than they were polite. Little by little the new hands, to whom the country was now entrusted, patched up the rents that their predecessors had so skilfully made, and with extreme difficulty succeeded in weathering the immediate dangers. But the panic had already risen to fever heat. On the 1st of January the belief was universal in Washington that there would be fighting in the city within the month. The talk in the hotels, in Congress, and in private society, everywhere men met, was, that a collision was inevitable. Stories flew about and were generally believed, which to a stranger seemed the wildest absurdity. The most flagrant treason was openly proclaimed, accompanied by threats that reminded one of the days of Catiline. Clerks in the Government Departments mounted the disunion badge and talked openly of oaths

they had taken never to permit the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. Before that should happen Washington would be a heap of ashes. Some of them appeared in costumes of homespun, and announced that it was the uniform of a corps of five hundred who were bound by solemn oaths never to allow the election to be declared or the inauguration to be consummated. Persons whose business led them to keep late hours were alarmed by meeting bodies of men drilling at midnight in the environs of the city. Anonymous letters, and warnings not anonymous, came in numbers to persons in power all dwelling on designs of violence to be used against the Capitol. If this could have been made light of as a mere passing effect of accidental and unorganized influences, the alarm might not have risen to such a height; but the more closely the matter was examined, the more formidable it appeared. The disunionists, either confident temperamentally or extremely mendacious, asserted loudly and with one voice that they were certain of obtaining possession of Washington before the 4th of March. The War Department, the only power which could control them, was in the hands of their most unscrupulous tool, whose long course of dishonest administration, flagrant even compared with the general corruption under the last two Presidents, led naturally to the belief that he would scruple at no violence if by it he could cover his tracks and obtain a claim on the consideration of the new Confederacy. Some of his measures were known. In spite of the universal alarm, no means of defence were taken by him. All the Federal troops were kept as far as possible from Washington. Large quantities of Federal arms were transferred by his orders from the loyal States to the extreme South. Still larger quantities, it was said, had been sold by him at merely nominal prices to the southern States, and it was also said that he had received a commission on such sales. When the investigation into the matter of the abstracted bonds took place, it became still more evident why he should have wished at all hazards to destroy the record of his administration. Long known to be dishonest, and long suspected of being a traitor, his course during this winter would, in any other country or time, have cost him his life. With this man at the head of the War Department, pledged to effect by every means, honest or dishonest, the destruction of the Government, and conscious that on his success depended, not only his name

and honor, which were already held in small esteem, but his power and future prospects and perhaps still more; with him and his confederates in power, it was no wonder that the people of Washington believed themselves lost.

A wide-spread and intricate conspiracy existed against the Government; so much was undoubted. Mr. Douglas and his friends denounced it openly, and traced it up to its source. For many years past there has been, it is true, a class of men in the southern States, as in the northern, who have wished for disunion as a thing good in itself. But this class was always small and could never have obtained the control of a single State as long as the slave power ruled the country. But, according to Mr. Douglas, when it became evident, at the dissolution of the Baltimore Convention in the spring of 1860, that the Democratic party were to lose their omnipotent voice in the affairs of the nation, the leading statesmen in the southern States framed a plan for the dissolution of the Union. They nominated Mr. Breckinridge for the Presidency, under the idea that they could combine on him the votes of every slave State, and having in this way carried Maryland and Virginia, they intended, or at least hoped, so to arrange the course of events that they might refuse to acknowledge the validity of the election, if the Republican candidate should be chosen, or in case of no choice by the people, that they might declare Mr. Breckinridge their President, obtain possession of Washington by means of their control of the Cabinet, and call upon all foreign Governments to recognize them as the Government *de facto*.

To defeat this conspiracy had been the object of Mr. Douglas's journey to Virginia and through the South. No one even at that time was wild enough to suppose that he expected to carry those States himself. Mr. Douglas was not so young nor so sanguine a politician as to expect a result like that. His object was to break up this southern combination and to throw the State of Virginia, on which great weight would evidently be laid, into the hands of the southern Whigs. His manœuvre was only partially successful. His influence did, it is true, defeat and just defeat the Democrats in Virginia, but Maryland and North Carolina, both old Whig States, were carried by the Breckinridge party. Still the main object was gained, and the southern line broken so that it was impossible to carry out the original plan of the disunionist leaders. The large ma-

jority of Mr. Lincoln and the hasty action of South Carolina disconcerted their plans and prevented that appearance of unity and combination that was necessary to make the explosion severe enough to overthrow the existing Government.

This was the conspiracy according to Mr. Douglas's views, openly declared in Washington and elsewhere. This coarse politician, whose animal features and bull-like voice make the admiration of the Senate galleries, revenged the insults that his old friends had heaped upon him, by striking at them in their own stronghold. How far mere patriotism led him to make this move, those who knew him best can judge. No man in the whole nation has done so much as he to degrade the standard of political morality and to further the efforts of the slave power. No man has suffered more from their resentment, and the harm he has done them during the last year may be some consolation to him for the bitterness of their persecution at that time when the President himself was not ashamed to lend the weight of his official position to shut the doors of his friends' houses in his face.

With all these facts and statements staring them in the face, it was reasonable enough that the people of Washington should be alarmed. They saw no way of escape, for both parties were at a deadlock and neither showed any sign of giving way. But with the purgation of the Cabinet, one most imminent danger was removed, though rather by the accidental boldness and honesty of Major Anderson than by any exertion of statesmanship on the part of the North. It fell upon Congress to decide in what way this stroke of fortune should be improved or neglected.

In circumstances of such sudden emergency as this of disunion, Congress is far too unwieldy and unreliable a body to give much hope of its becoming an efficient agent for anything but further embroilment. It is strange to see how few men there are in such a body, where yet each must have some position or reputation for ability however small it may be, who are capable of rising to the level of any occasion be it ever so little above their ordinary mark.

At such times a few men make a reputation for a life-time; the rest will neither follow them nor take any decided steps themselves unless their constituents have already endorsed it. No branch of the Government has a greater power for good or

evil than Congress in dangerous times, and yet it is generally reserved for the Executive or for the energy of single men to throw the decisive weight into the scales while Congress is still laboring after a decision.

So it was during the whole of this winter. With the Senate the case was desperate from the beginning. It was here that the whole disunion scheme had its origin and this was always its stronghold. Of all the southern Senators only two made even an effort to uphold the Government under which they had been born and to which, till a few months before, they had vowed the most unfaltering devotion. Mr. Crittenden, an old Whig, attempted to do something, but succeeded in little more than showing his own honesty and good intentions. He began his work at the wrong end. Wishing to obtain some foundation on which the North and South could unite, he was prevailed upon by his southern friends to offer measures to which it was impossible for the Republicans to accede. In this way the evil which he did became far greater than the good, for the real effect of his effort was to furnish a ground on which the disunionists could stand and make use of his name and influence in their own favor. He became practically an instrument of the secessionists. He himself soon perceived the false position he occupied, and did his best to correct the mistake. But the evil was already done and, before he could set himself right, far the greater part of the power which he might have exerted was expended.

It was not so with Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. Although a Democrat, and a follower of Mr. Breckinridge in the election, he would not yield to the tyranny which bound every other southern man in the Senate, more or less, as well as no small number of the northerners. He did not, like Mr. Crittenden, begin by practically siding with the secessionists. He limited himself to fighting disunion and treason and declaring a war of extermination with it, without putting a price on his services, but rather declaring that he was strong enough to vindicate his own rights in the Union, whoever might attack them. His bold and uncompromising attack was the first great blow that the disunionists suffered in Congress.¹ Jefferson Davis actually writhed under it, and listened with a look and an attitude of

¹ Johnson spoke on December 18 and 19, 1860.

the bitterest hatred and disgust. It was a defection from their own ranks ; a rebellion among their own slaves. It was a grave matter indeed when a Breckinridge Senator dared break through party lines and strike such a blow at the power which controlled all his friends.

These two men at least did stand up for the Union among the southern Senators, but the northern Democrats did not even rise as far as this. Not one of all that crew of peddling politicians ever took bold and honest ground on the new issue. Their Telamonian Ajax, Mr. Douglas, and all his herd of followers still avoided an honest avowal of a broad, unhesitating acquiescence in the new contest, and still left it doubtful which of the two they were really acting against, the disunionists or the Republicans. A true statesman, or even a high-minded man, would have seized the first opportunity to place himself above party on such a question as this. Mr. Douglas is neither the one nor the other. He, like so many others, failed to rise to the occasion. Of all the members of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, three or four names only can be picked out, of men who *grew* during this winter. Three or four only, when there was the grandest opportunity for development that ever has occurred under the Government ! And, of these few, Mr. Douglas was not one.

Rather through the faults and mistakes of their opponents than through their own skill, the Republicans managed to maintain their ground tolerably well. Their first fear had been that the North would again yield to some compromise by which the old state of things would be brought back and a new struggle become necessary. Probably their fears would have been justified if the southern States had not, by withdrawing, thrown the whole power into the hands of the firmer anti-slavery men. But when it became evident that the danger did not now lie on this side, but was rather lest all the slave States should be dragged out and thus involve the whole country in a common ruin, a difference of opinion, as to the policy to be pursued, soon showed itself. One wing of the party declared for a strong policy by which the seceding States should be compelled to submit to the laws. Many of these really underrated the danger and difficulty, or, if they saw it, yet could not conscientiously take any steps to avoid it. Others confounded the conspirators with the slave-holders, placing all on

the same footing, which was exactly what the disunionists were straining every nerve to bring about. Thus these practically played into the hands of the traitors by doing all in their power to combine the southern States. Others were perhaps conscientiously not unwilling that all the slave States should secede, believing that to be the shortest and surest way of obtaining the destruction of the slave power, as it was certainly a very sure way of obtaining the destruction of their own, if their policy should lead to civil war and a revulsion of feeling in the North. On the other hand, an influential portion of the party urged temporizing till the height of the fever was over, and were in favor of shaping their policy in such a way as to secure the border States and prevent bloodshed. Mr. Seward declared himself very early in the winter a favorer of conciliation in this way. He felt that something must be done, not only to resist disunion in the South, where it was every day acquiring more strength, but to sustain himself and his party in the North, where they were not strong enough to sustain the odium of a dissolution and civil war. For it is a fact, and it is right that it should be so, that with the people the question of the nation's existence will in the end override all party issues, no matter what they may be, and Mr. Seward foresaw that if the new administration was to prove a success it must shape its course so as to avoid the responsibility of the convulsion, and obtain the confidence of a large majority of the people.

This difference of opinion, as to the policy to be pursued, began first to develop itself in the Committee which the House had appointed to consider the whole question of the national troubles. When that Committee met, there was of course nothing but confusion in their minds. Heaps of different plans were thrown upon them, and for some time nothing was done but listen to what each member had to say on his own account. After all, the great wish was to gain time. Very few persons expected really that the Committee would agree on anything, or would effect any good result, further than that of relieving the House of the whole matter as long as possible. But the more violent of the southern men were determined not to allow this. They went into the Committee in order either to control it or to break it up, and in order to bring matters to a head they pressed on it measures which they knew could not be

adopted. Mr. Rust of Arkansas,¹ who, under the pretence of being a Union man, did all he could to help the seceders, and Mr. Reuben Davis of Mississippi, a violent disunionist, took the lead in trying to dragoon the other southern men into retiring from the Committee. They brought forward an ultimatum which they insisted on having considered at once, or else they would withdraw. The Committee refused to leave the regular order of business, whereupon the individuals executed their threat and withdrew in high anger; but, with that methodical madness which seems to be part of the southern character, they withdrew only to the next room, where they sat in solitary dignity and watched the proceedings through the open door till their own measure should come up for discussion.

A few experiments like this soon showed that the disunion element in the Committee was not strong enough to break it up. The only hope of the disunionists became, then, to place the Republicans in such a position as to make reconciliation impossible. Their cry was that the Republicans showed no wish to conciliate; that they intended the forcible emancipation of the slaves, and so on; all which was denied by the Republicans, to be sure, but which still placed the members from the border States in a very hard position. They were honestly Union men. They were, too, in several cases at least, unconditional Union men, but their States were then very doubtful, and the clamor of the seceders might destroy their influence in case the Committee failed to do anything. They urged earnestly and honestly on the Republicans, a retreat from the positions of the campaign, and when that was refused they entreated only some sign of good-will; something, no matter what, with which they could go home and deny the charges of the disunionists. They offered their own measures of conciliation, and when these were refused they asked the Republicans whether they could do nothing in return; whether they were fixed in their determination to drive away the border States and let the spirit of disunion take its course whatever might be the result.

The Republicans hesitated. On one side they felt the weight of these prayers, for prayers they really were; and wished to do what they could for their allies. But that was not all. One by one the meshes of that vast conspiracy were becoming

¹ Albert Rust.

manifest, in which they were entangled. It was every day clearer that the danger was not imagined; that the flood of disunion feeling was advancing at fearful speed towards Washington, and threatened to overwhelm Virginia and even Maryland. And as State after State set up the standard of rebellion, and treason proclaimed itself in the Capitol and White House itself; when crowded galleries broke into violent applause over disunion speeches, and the whole city was expecting an outbreak from day to day; as it became more and more evident that the credit of the Government was tottering; its army and navy useless or nearly so; its whole frame and action hampered, weakened, broken wherever practicable, and the traitors still at its head; as all this gradually forced itself upon the minds of the leading Republicans, and they began to see the danger they ran, and to feel the tangling knots of that great net in which they were snared, they opened their eyes to their hazardous position and began to stretch their hands about them for some firm support.

While the Committee was still in doubt and the chance of a good result was becoming more and more dim, a blow was delivered by one man at the secessionists, which changed the whole face of the battle. Mr. Winter Davis in the House struck out fiercely at disunion like Andrew Johnson in the Senate, and with the same success.¹ But to understand Mr. Davis's position fairly it is necessary to know something of his history, and he is remarkable enough as a politician to make such a parenthesis interesting.

As for the last eight or ten years the opposition to the slave power developed itself, and it became more and more evident that its ultimate success was only a question of time, it was naturally to be expected that men would appear here and there in the southern States who, either out of ambition or from other motives, would ally themselves with the North, and as the Democratic party had become identified with the slave power, it was evident that these men, if they appeared at all, would be found among the southern Whigs. But there is very little boldness in American politicians, and though it was no rare thing for the southern Whigs to act secretly in concert with the Republicans, only one of them ventured in Congress to

¹ Davis delivered his speech on February 7. It will be found in the Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2d Session, Appendix, 181.

place himself openly on the record. His course was that of one man in a hundred thousand.

Mr. Henry Winter Davis of Maryland first rose to any prominence in public life by his connection with the Know-Nothing party in 1854, or thereabouts. When the old Whigs lost their power in the North, the southern Whig States began to fall one after another into Democratic hands. But even the riveting influence of slavery and the growing strength of the Republicans were not enough to unite Whigs and Democrats in the southern border States. They were divided by many years of bitter strife and hatred. To an old Whig in Tennessee, or Kentucky, or Maryland, who had grown up to despise a Democrat as the meanest and most despicable of creatures; who had been taught in the semi-barbarous school of southern barbecues and stump harangues, gouging and pistol shooting, to hate and abhor the very word Democrat with a bitterness unknown to the quieter and more law-abiding northerners, the idea of submitting finally and hopelessly to the Democratic rule, was not to be endured. Accordingly, when the Native American party made its appearance, these men rushed into it, in a mass, as a means of bolstering up their waning power, and under the prestige of its extraordinary successes and underhand organization, managed for a time to sweep everything before them. Among the States which they ruled most completely was Maryland, and among the first to avail himself of this new ladder was Mr. Henry Winter Davis of Baltimore.

But the new movement was not without its drawbacks. One great feature of the Know-Nothings was their enmity to Catholics and the Catholic religion; but in Maryland where the old families still retain their Catholicism and rule the tone of society, no gentleman could become with impunity a leader in a party so obnoxious to them. This alone was cause enough for their hating Davis with a bitter hatred. But this was not all. The secret organization of the Native American attracted large numbers of the worst class of rowdies and bullies into the party, and in Baltimore they made use of their power in the wildest and most disgraceful way, electing a Mayor who sympathized with them, and, on the day of election, surrounding the polls in armed bands. With a sort of fantastic humor, they provided themselves with awls, and punched their political opponents with them, when they came

up to deposit their votes. An examination of one sufferer by this torture showed no less than twenty-four such wounds. The amusement became a characteristic of the Baltimore "Plug-ugly," and in the Know-Nothing processions a huge wooden awl was carried about, as one of the insignia of the party. It is among the worst of the charges against Mr. Winter Davis that he allowed himself to speak from a platform on which a symbolical awl was conspicuously placed, and that he himself mentioned in one of his speeches this rowdyism as a mere passing exuberance of the spirit of freedom. In the course of these excesses the evil reached such a height that Baltimore, on election day, lay at the mercy of these ruffians, and several murders of peculiarly brutal and revolting nature heralded and accompanied their triumph.

Outraged in this way, polite society turned on the Native Americans and a bitter war was waged. Mr. Winter Davis gained indeed the political victory for a time, but roused against himself the most intense hatred in that circle of society to which he himself belonged. He, a gentleman, educated, polished, refined, was accused of having countenanced these barbarities; of having given encouragement to crime and protection to murder. Society proscribed him. His name was erased from the books of the clubs. He was persecuted in every way that even female ingenuity could invent. Probably no man in this country ever went through more bitter social trials or a more complete series of mortifications than Mr. Winter Davis and his family at Baltimore; but he was not a man to be crushed by such burdens. He fought it through, and marched on his way.

One may or may not endorse Mr. Davis's course, or believe the excuses and justifications which his friends advance in his favor. It may or may not be true that his ambition dragged him beyond honorable bounds into unprincipled action. But at least it is impossible not to admire the energy and skill of the politician, his buoyancy and his inflexible will.

With these antecedents he took his seat as a member of the Thirty-fourth Congress. It has so happened that in both the Thirty-fourth and Thirty-sixth Congresses, the South Americans, or rather the old Whigs, for such they really are, have held the balance of power in their hands, and more than once the vote of Mr. Winter Davis has turned the scale. So early as

the election of Mr. Banks as Speaker¹ his vote exercised an influence which held the opposite party in check. It was his vote that brought to an end the long struggle over the Speakership in 1859-60,² and it needed no common courage for a southern man at that time to take the responsibility of electing a Republican Speaker. In the five years of his Congressional course he had made his mark on the House. It is very seldom in that noisy, tumultuous body that any member can command silent attention; but when Mr. Davis rose, members dropped their newspapers, put down their pens, stopped their conversation and crowded around him. He regularly conquered their admiration and finally rose to the first rank of Congressional statesmen. His very appearance told to a certain degree in his favor, for the representative of the Baltimore "Plugs," perhaps the most reckless and lawless ruffians in the country, was among the very few men in the House who appeared like a quiet, educated, well-bred gentleman. Whatever his associations may have been, his private character was above dispute, and even the scrupulous nicety of his dress and the somewhat studied courtesy of his manner are enough alone to make his bitterest enemies doubt the truth of the charges they themselves bring against him. That his strong points are dashed with a touch of vanity and a certain love of admiration, it is not worth while to deny. There are few public men who are not vain, and generally with much less cause. But even his weaknesses are not without their interest, increasing one's surprise as they do at the life of struggle and conflict he has led.

From the first sitting of the Committee of Thirty-three, Mr. Davis took a bold lead in its deliberations. For him everything depended on the faithfulness of Virginia to the Government, and he fought the disunionists with a desperation warranted by what he had at stake. When it at last became evident that Mr. Crittenden's measure in regard to the Territories was the rock on which they were to split, he did not hesitate to throw over all remaining doubts and hesitation, and declare boldly against it. On the 20th of December, after long discussions and vehement pressure from the South, in-

¹ In the 34th Congress.

² Resulting in the election, on February 1, 1860, of William Pennington, of New Jersey.

tended either to drive the Republicans from their position or to break up the Committee, and unite the slave States in the secession movement, and when the scales inclined gradually towards the southern side, and little hope remained that further discussion would be of use, Mr. Davis rose from his seat with a proposition which gave an electric shock to the whole Committee. It was the since well-known measure for the admission of New Mexico.¹ No sooner was it proposed than the southern members, starting as if a bomb-shell had fallen among them, began whispering together, retired into the next chamber and held a long consultation, and finally returned to say that the proposition was inadmissible and not to be thought of. The next day the Committee adjourned for a week, unwilling to renounce all hope, but despairing of any agreement.

The step Mr. Davis had taken was, however, too bold and too skilful, and offered too many advantages, to allow the Republicans to let the chance slip from their hands without an effort, at a time when it was of the gravest importance that the Committee should not be broken up. It was the week of the Christmas holidays. On the 24th, Saturday and Sunday having passed since the Committee adjourned, the Republican members met in caucus and discussed all the proposed measures of conciliation at length. On the 25th, Christmas-day, they held another meeting, at which Judge Watts,² a gentleman from New Mexico, was present, and told at length all that nine years of experience had taught him about that Territory. His testimony, clear and decided, and lasting through several hours of careful questioning into every particular, was thought conclusive by a majority of the members present, and the next day, at still another meeting, the proposition of Mr. Davis was adopted as a Republican measure. With it was adopted the sketch of an Amendment to the Constitution, providing against the complaints of the southern members as to a possible forced abolition of slavery; an Amendment which met at that time little or no opposition, and which was understood to be merely a reassertion of a similar article of the Chicago platform. And as the fittest person to present these measures in order to carry conviction to the South, the mem-

¹ The bill was read for the first time on February 1, 1861, and is printed in the Congressional Globe, 36th Congress, 2d Session, 1326.

² John S. Watts.

bers selected Mr. Adams of Massachusetts, whose position on the slavery question had stood unshaken through sixteen years of trial and sacrifice, and to whose support, at the critical moment, the adoption of the measures was probably due.

It was in this way that the policy of conciliation was initiated. It will be a question that History only can decide, which of the two wings of the Republican party were right; whether that one which saw hope only in an exercise of force, or that which saw in the outbreak of a war for which they could be made in any degree responsible, only the cast of a loaded die, by which they could not win and must lose. This was the sum total of the difference of opinion among the Republicans, and those Democrats and members of the rump of the old Whig party in the North, who flattered themselves with the idea that Mr. Seward and his friends were retracing their steps and modifying their principles, were never more mistaken. The difference was wholly one of future policy; not of recorded principle. The policy of the one wing led to a violent destruction of the slave power; perhaps by war, perhaps by a slave insurrection. The policy of the other wing was to prevent a separation in order to keep the slave power more effectually under control, until its power for harm should be gradually exhausted, and its whole fabric gently and peacefully sapped away. The extremists on the one side did not hesitate to assert that the only cure for the evils of the nation must be looked for in a violent convulsion; that the end of slavery, like all other oppression, was in blood: such was the law of God. The followers of Mr. Seward declared that even if such were law, under some divine system of bloody compensation, it was still their duty to do their utmost to prevent the victory of freedom which they had gained, and which should be a blessing to the American people, from becoming even temporarily its curse. They foresaw, too, as the result of such a contest, a fatal and irresistible revulsion of feeling throughout the country, by which the slave power would be restored to its old position, perhaps at the expense of the northern tier of States, whose resistance to such a reaction would very possibly prove fatal only to themselves. But each portion of the party, notwithstanding the temporary division, was equally hostile to the slave power, and each portion held as sacredly as ever to the principles which had always guided its course.

The full Committee met again on the 28th, and on that day the proposed Amendment to the Constitution was offered by Mr. Adams, and adopted almost unanimously. But in the meanwhile the report of the New Mexico proposition, unexpected and misrepresented as it was, created considerable alarm and opposition. The Senators objected to it, and even Governor Seward was in doubt whether the time for such a step had yet arrived. But on that same day a similar proposition made by Mr. Rice of Minnesota¹ in the Senate Committee, received the Republican votes ; and, the last obstacle being thus removed, on the 29th December, as it appears by the Journal of the Committee, Mr. Adams introduced the New Mexico proposition, which was at once adopted by a vote of thirteen to eleven, Mr. Bristow of Kentucky² being the only southern member who voted in its favor.

The effect of this move was immediate ; for, though it satisfied very few persons and commanded the energetic support of still fewer, it still prevented the dissolution of the Committee, and cut at once, as with a knife, through the coalition which was on the brink of forming itself between the border and the cotton States. It drove Mr. Taylor of Louisiana³ and the other extreme southern members out of the Committee at once ; but it gave to the members from the border States an opportunity to remain with honor. Mr. Nelson of Tennessee⁴ declared afterward, in his speech before the House, that he had gone up to the Committee on that very morning with his mind made up to announce his formal withdrawal from its deliberation on the ground that there was no chance of reaching an agreement. The change of policy that day initiated, alone prevented him from uniting with the other seceders in their attempt to break down this last bridge by which aid could be hoped for.

The crisis in the Committee was passed, and from this time the interest of their deliberations decreased. But meanwhile the first days of January came on, the blackest our country had seen since the adoption of the Constitution. The traitors were one by one leaving the Cabinet where they had for years shown to the world the singular spectacle of a Government trying to destroy itself. General Scott had at last been summoned to Washington, after Mr. Floyd had, with his usual

¹ Henry M. Rice.

³ Miles Taylor.

² Francis M. Bristow.

⁴ Thomas A. R. Nelson.

honesty, counteracted all his previous efforts to place the military force of the nation in a serviceable position. The frauds discovered in the Interior Department had begun to assume a vague and astonishing size. Public confidence and courage were shattered. Everything was in confusion and the new officers found a state of affairs, in the Departments committed to their charge, that filled them with alarm and even despair. And there remained yet two months to be bridged over before any solid foundation for a renewal of hope could be reached.

Through all these scenes Mr. Seward, the great leader of the Republicans, had kept silence and had worked in quiet to combine and re-organize the broken and wavering columns of his party. From the first outbreak his course had been clear to his own mind; and he was probably the only man in Congress, on the northern side, who went to Washington prepared for what might happen with a definite policy to meet it. Certainly he was the only one who succeeded in carrying out such a policy and balancing himself and the nation upon it. Early in December the offer had been made to him by the President-elect of the first place in his new administration, and after some hesitation had been accepted. Of this the public knew for some time nothing. But by common consent all eyes were turned on him, and he was overwhelmed by entreaties from men in all sections of the country to do something to save the Union. Utterly panic-stricken they came to him with prayers and tears. The people of Washington came to him on the 1st of January in numbers, with positive assertions that they and the whole city would be in the hands of traitors within a month unless he did something to save them. To such appeals his answer was: "Save yourselves; you alone can do it; organize; form military companies; watch your suspected men." Members of the Cabinet came to him in absolute despair and called on him for counsel. The advice that he gave was not thrown away. Letters on letters came to him from the Union men in the border slave States urging immediate action and asking help and advice. He extended his connections far into the slave States, everywhere striving to guide the Union policy and to raise up and unite the Union sentiment. He became virtually the ruler of the country. With that cool wisdom and philosophical self-control, so peculiar to his character, he comprehended at once the true nature of his position and gave all his

energies to carrying on the struggle. Foreseeing that the battle was to be fought in the border States, and that they must at all hazards be held back, at least till the 4th of March, he cleared his eyes, without an effort, of the cobwebs that blinded other men, and devoted himself to the labor of effecting a firm alliance with the Unionists of Virginia and Maryland, to check the evil while there was yet time.

Those who saw and followed Mr. Seward during all the anxieties and cares of this long struggle, are little likely to forget the lessons he then taught them. Cheerful where everyone else was in despair; cool and steady where everyone else was panic-struck; clear-sighted where other men were blind; grand in resource where every resource seemed exhausted; guiding by quiet and unseen influences those who seemed to act independently on their own ground; holding the great threads of public policy in his hand without parade or display, and, with his vast power of combination, touching them all with reference only to one clear and definite end; avoiding harsh contact with all men, and steering with a firm and steady grasp between his friends who were ready to denounce him, and his enemies who were eager to destroy him, the ultras of the North and South alike; yielding without obstinacy where resistance was too great, yet striking with fresh energy wherever resistance seemed weak; pertinacious in his attack, and inexhaustible in his armory of weapons, he fought, during these three months of chaos, a fight which might go down to history as one of the wonders of statesmanship.

It was not till nearly half the session was over and the debate in the Senate approached its close, that he declared himself and his policy to the country.¹ Probably no speech in Congress was ever expected with so much eagerness as his, for it had been announced that he was to be the head of the new administration, which in the absence of his chief made him the most important man in the nation, even without the weight of his great reputation. Forming as it did only one part of his base of operations, it was aimed, as was his whole policy, directly at the border States. It gave form and authority to the other efforts he was making to combine and encourage the Union men in those States, and never were efforts

¹ He spoke on January 12, 1861. — *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2d Session, 341.

more successful or a course of policy better justified by the result. The effect of the speech was instantaneous. From that day the rumors of war began to subside; the Union men in the South took new courage; public confidence began to re-establish itself, the country breathed more freely and hope rapidly rose. Letters poured in on him from the South, and he received as many from Virginia alone, as he did from his own State. With the short time and the comparatively small means in his power, he could do little more than give the tone, and the organization of the Union party was very incomplete; but it was enough to form a nucleus for something better, and was effective so far as it went. Luckily for the country, Maryland had an honest man at its head. If a secessionist had then been its governor in Mr. Hicks's place, it is more than probable that under the first violent shock, she would have been dragged out of the Union, as was Georgia, by force of fraud. Andrew Johnson and the Whigs took care of Tennessee; and Kentucky showed no wish to move; so the great and decisive struggle rested always in Virginia. There the secessionists did not dare to declare openly for disunion, but with that specious logic and plausible weakness that had marked more or less nearly all their prominent men from early times, they hid themselves behind the flimsy defence of what they called "reconstruction," by which the anti-slavery portion of the Union was to be thrown aside, and the fable of the Phoenix, or of Medea and Pelias, if experience and appearances be true, was to be at last verified. Already before the election in that State, foreseeing a Convention, which, if not absolutely sympathizing with disunion, must yet be sensitive to every evil influence, Mr. Seward had caused another Convention to be summoned at Washington where all the questions of the day might be discussed by distinguished men from every State, and such measures taken as might seem to them expedient, and offered as a recommendation to the Government.

The Virginia election came at last, and with a long breath of relief the country began to wake from its despair. Slowly the great ship seemed to right itself, broken and water-logged it is true, but not wrecked. A most essential point had been gained, and at last it seemed as though firm ground was felt. But it was still necessary to reach the 4th of March in quiet, and it was very evident that the disunionists there would strain

every nerve to force action within the three weeks which still remained. It was then that Mr. Seward's dexterous expedient to control them and paralyze their action, showed its efficiency. With an astuteness that completely outgeneraled all his opponents, he kept the Peace Convention at work until the Inauguration was close at hand, while the Union men in Virginia and the other border States insisted that no step should be taken until the result of that Convention was known. Thus the danger was fought off and the way to the Inauguration was cleared.

Thus all winter long the great battle was kept up with varying success, but on the whole to the disadvantage of the disunionists. Their original hope that the Government would fall to pieces under the shock of their treason, proved vain, and all their efforts to draw any but the cotton States into the rebellion had proved futile. They had been driven from the Government with the disgrace that attaches to thieves and traitors, a disgrace which among themselves they might wear upon their sleeves and call a badge of honor, if they chose, but which with men uninflamed by their passions will be none the less disgraceful. They were held in check by the Government on all sides, and it was evident even to their most enthusiastic supporters that they were on the high road to ruin unless some change for the better took place. Their only means for effecting this was by getting the assistance of Virginia, which would settle the fact of disunion and enable them to force on the world as a "*fait accompli*" that which no one would acknowledge as good or right in itself. In order to counteract their attempts on Virginia, the more moderate of the Republicans in Congress pressed the passage of the measures passed by the Committee of Thirty-three, which were declared by the southern Whigs sufficient to answer all their purposes. On the passage of these measures the final contest took place, and this time not among the southerners but among the Republicans, who hesitated and doubted about a step which could not do them a straw's weight of harm and which might if properly used save them an overwhelming burden of misfortune. One after another all the men of influence threw their weight into the scales which still wavered in doubt. Mr. Seward, Mr. Winter Davis, and the southern Whigs, Mr. Adams, Mr. Sherman and a large share of the best ability of the party, exhausted their influence

in advocating these measures, and still the mass of the party hesitated, and turned for the decisive word to the final authority at Springfield. The word did not come. In its stead came doubtful rumors tending to distract public opinion still more. In spite of the assertions of newspapers and to the surprise of the country it became more and more evident that there was no concerted action between the President-elect and the Republicans at Washington, and that Mr. Seward had acted all winter on his own responsibility. The effect of this discovery was soon evident in the gradual destruction of party discipline in Congress, where every man began to follow an independent course, or commit himself against the measures proposed, from an idea that the President was against them.

Mr. Lincoln arrived in Washington and took up the reins of control. It soon became very evident that, so far as the Republican party is concerned, secession if properly managed is rather a benefit than a misfortune. Anti-slavery was the only ground on which it could act with anything like unanimity. In ordinary times the tariff bill would have broken it down, and even under the tremendous pressure of disunion, the struggle over the Cabinet shook it to its very centre. On all questions except that of slavery it can never act together with any reliable degree of concert, made up as it is of incongruous elements freshly and roughly joined together. Under these circumstances the task of Mr. Lincoln was one which might well have filled with alarm the greatest statesman that ever lived. He had to deal with men and measures that would have taxed the patience of Washington and required the genius of Napoleon. It was therefore not to be expected, nor indeed wished, that on his arrival he would instantly throw himself into the arms of either set of his friends before judging for himself the merits of the case ; nor was it possible that all the dangers and pressing necessities of the time should be wholly apparent to him. The matter of the passage of the Corwin measures became one of secondary interest, the result of those measures depending as they did on the influence which was to prevail in the Cabinet. This influence became now the great feature of the day, and the struggle was vehement between the two wings of the party. The mere fact that the Cabinet had not yet been agreed upon was sufficient to prove that Mr. Lincoln, while placing Mr. Seward in the chief place in his

councils, did not intend to allow his influence to rule it, and the result of the contest between the friends of Mr. Winter Davis and Mr. Blair¹ soon decided this question beyond a doubt. Mr. Seward's policy had been to go outside of the party in selecting members of the Cabinet from southern States, and to choose men whose influence would have strengthened the administration. The fact that Mr. Blair, a strict Republican, was preferred over any other man to represent Maryland and Virginia in the Cabinet, was decisive of the policy of the Government, and the death-blow to the policy of Mr. Seward.

When once this question was settled it was of little consequence what became of the proposed measures of conciliation, which were worth nothing, except as one weak link in the chain by which the border States were to be held to the Union. Still the battle went on no less fiercely in Congress, and the radical wing of the Republicans, not yet conscious that this question was a mere subordinate, lost on other ground than that on which they resisted it, went so far as to threaten to stop the business of the House, defeat the appropriation bills and throw the burden of an immediate new Congress on the administration. Happily no such folly was committed, and the measure so hardly disputed was passed by bare majorities. The New Mexico proposition was defeated by southern Union votes and no one was sorry to see it so ended. It had been proposed and adopted merely as a means of crushing the Crittenden measures and putting an end to the demand for protection to slavery in the Territories. As such it had answered its purpose, and no one regretted that southern men should take the responsibility of defeating it. On the very morning of the 4th of March, the Senate passed the Amendment to the Constitution by exactly the necessary vote; and even then it was said in Washington that some careful manipulation, as well as the direct influence of the new President, was needed before this measure, so utterly innocent and unobjectionable, could be passed.

It will be a problem that those who are fond of such riddles may pore over, what would have been the end of the matter if Mr. Seward had then carried his point, and the conciliatory policy had become the policy of the Government. No man, probably, except the actors themselves in these scenes, knows

¹ Montgomery Blair.

what the course of events really was, yet from what is public it is fair to suppose that Mr. Seward contemplated a very cautious and forbearing course. It is known that he wished to open the Cabinet to the southern Unionists irrespective of party. Hence it is reasonable to suppose that he would have strengthened their hands by every means in his power. Mr. Jefferson Davis, whose whole course was directed towards drawing the border States into the secession movement, and who, to effect this, had restrained his followers from all aggression, had caused the old Constitution to be re-enacted with but few changes, and the old tariff to be adopted in spite of all complaints; Mr. Davis was to be checkmated at all hazards. The Virginia Congressional elections which were to come in May, would have been the decisive point. In order to enable the Unionists to carry these and force a reaction, Mr. Seward would no doubt have caused Forts Sumter and Pickens to be abandoned as useless to him except for what they would bring. He would have set every engine to work to redeem the border States and place them in the hands of reliable men, and no doubt he would have employed the same policy upon the unionists of Georgia and Alabama. Yet towards foreign nations we must suppose that his tone would have been the more dignified, as it was gentle and forbearing at home. No infringement of our laws, whether in relation to duties or otherwise, would have been permitted, and if attempted, would have been instantly resented. And if at last all this caution and delicacy were rewarded by the hoped-for revolution in the border States and the gradual disintegration of the seceders, it is not improbable that, exchanging finally his caution for boldness, Mr. Seward would with a single blow have shattered their whole fabric in the dust.

Such is probably the policy which the friends of Mr. Seward hoped to see adopted. Whether it would have answered their hopes, it is of little use to inquire. Like all such attempts at wisdom and moderation in times of heated passions and threatening war, it was swallowed up and crushed under the weight of brute force, that final tribunal to which human nature is subjected or subjects herself without appeal. Yet it is right to make the effort even if overruled. Through all the chaos of anxiety and contest which marked Mr. Seward's reign of two months, it was evident that he at

least felt the highest confidence in the course he pursued. He declared himself bent on weathering the storm without the loss of a single life. Under all the dangers and trials, the cares and the triumphs of his dictatorship, he maintained always the same self-control and calmness, never parading his importance and never losing his self-command. "You look worn, Mr. Seward," said a friend to him one day towards the end of the winter. "Yes," he replied with his slow, rough and careless manner; "the short session is generally the hardest work." "God damn you, Seward, you've betrayed your principles and the party; we've followed your lead long enough," growled a Senator at him one day, in answer to some interposed advice on business in the Senate Chamber. The insult was gross enough and pointed enough to hurt perhaps, but caused no retort. In his natural calmness of disposition and his self-taught quiet, he was as immovable outwardly under praise as under blame. Only once was it known that he ever felt what was said of him, and then it was not without reason, when he opened the envelope and read the sonnet which the poet Whittier sent to him from Amesbury.

In this short and superficial sketch of the course of events at the Capitol during the last winter, it is not intended to attempt the accuracy of history, nor would it be possible to detail even the bare record of what took place in those three months without writing a volume at least. Yet merely from this sketch one result plainly appears. It is said very generally among our people that our theory of Government is a failure. We know that it has been the subject of long controversy and stands now as an experiment. As with all other governments, so with this, it was to be expected that time would bring its trials, and until they came, and the fact of their having been endured and surmounted was patent to the world, this experiment, founded by men in whose work theory had been too largely mixed with experience to permit even themselves to feel absolute confidence in it, could never be called a complete success. In the event of such a trial the mere individuals, whom accident made the instruments for upholding or overthrowing the Government, are lost in the interest which attaches to the great argument by which a question of such fearful magnitude is to be decided.

For nearly half a century it has been growing clearer and

clearer every day whence this trial was to come. By an unfortunate necessity which has grown with its growth, the country contained in itself, at its foundation, the seeds of its future troubles. By the Constitution a great political, social and geographical or sectional power within the Government was created; in its nature a monopoly; in its theory contrary to and subversive of the whole spirit of Republican institutions. A monarchy, such as that of England, may contain, though not without danger, such monopolies and social distinctions, though its permanence must always depend on a nice and intricate adjustment of their powers, but such is not the case with a Republic. Its existence depends upon the absence of such distinctions, and all monopolies or corporations that exercise a direct political influence as such, are contrary to the spirit of the Government and hurtful to its integrity. They must be kept down or they will pervert the whole body politic.

The grand corporation known under the name of the slave-power, peculiarly offensive as it was, not only to the spirit of our Government but to that of our religion and whole civilization, did very shortly pervert the whole body politic, and as an inevitable result of its very existence, the nation divided into parties, one of which favored its continuing to control the Government; the other striving to rescue the power from its hands. While maintaining the Constitution and its grants, good or bad as they might be thought, their effort was to reduce the evil results of such grants to their lowest possible standard and to raise the good results to their highest. After a long and bitter contest the slave power was for the first time defeated, and deprived, not of its legitimate power, not of its privileges as originally granted in the Constitution, but of its control of the Government; and suddenly in the fury of its unbridled license, it raised its hand to destroy that Government. The great secession winter of 1860-61 was therefore the first crucial test of our political system.

Has the system stood that test? The answer will be as various as men's educations and turn of mind. And yet where else, in any country over the broad surface of the globe, has there ever existed the Government capable of sustaining so long and so tremendous a pressure as this! What genius has ever yet described, or what nation has ever drawn from the

cumulative wisdom of centuries, a system more strong, more elastic, more tenacious, more full of life and instinct with self-consciousness than ours? Where in all history is there to be found an instance of a power such as slavery has shown itself, peaceably ejected from the Government and forced to become rebels or submit? In other countries it would have needed a violent and bloody struggle to drive it from its throne. Where else is or has there ever been that Government which could for five months remain inactive, while so vast a rebellion was developing itself under its very eyes, without breaking down into anarchy under the weight of its very inactivity? There does not exist and never has existed the Government which could maintain itself and the public peace; which could with wise and cautious patience bear and forbear, wait and endure, and stretch its elastic membranes beyond the limits of all credibility as ours has done during the last year. Nor, if strength is wanted, has ever any Government developed more than our own, when, at one stamp of his foot, the President called the whole nation to arms, and the bristling lines of bayonets poured down from every township in the North, to sustain the integrity of the Union.

Mr. SANBORN read the following communication on the present state of information concerning Michel Guillaume St. Jean de Cr veco ur, once commonly called "Hector St. John":

Some years ago, after reading the French biography of the above-named rather mystifying personage, and the six volumes in French of his American essays, letters and notes, I undertook to give some connected and authenticated account of him and his works in English. This was printed in the Proceedings of this Society for 1906,¹ and, in a briefer form, in the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography.²

Prof. W. P. Trent of Columbia University, who had given his name as voucher for a new edition of the faulty and mystifying English edition of the "Letters of an American Farmer," on being assured of its defects, and of the real facts about its author, at once interested himself to have the whole

¹ 2 Proc. xx. 20, 32, 582.

² July, 1906, xxx. 257.

career of St. John de Crèveœur traced out; and in this work he engaged the talents and research of one of the Columbia students, Miss Julia Post Mitchell, a relative of the astronomer, Maria Mitchell, who has now for some years been investigating St. John's adventures and writings, both in America and in Europe; making many discoveries, some of which I have communicated to the Society. Lately she has visited the site of St. John's farm in Blooming-Grove, Orange County, N. Y., and has found, as she believes, the very house (modernized) of which a sketch was given, from the Farmer's own drawing, in our Proceedings for 1906. The identification seems to be complete. She has examined the deeds of purchase and sale, and finds that he bought the farm under the name of Hector St. John, though perfectly aware that was not the name by which he was baptized, married, and finally buried in his native France. His marriage certificate, signed by J. P. Tétard, a Calvinist pastor in the Province of New York, gives him his baptismal name, but adds, "commonly called Mr. St. John." His three children were all born at his Pine Hill farm, and his house (now called "Elmcote") was built by himself, near the ancient Crommelin house,—the first one erected in that region, in 1716. Crommelin himself was a Frenchman born, as so many of the Huguenot ancestors of New York citizens were. Tétard was afterwards French instructor in Columbia College, after it dropped the name of "King's."

Miss Mitchell will include in her book about St. John many facts not before known, or forgotten, and will clear up some of the mystery still attaching to his youthful career, and to his brief visit to Ireland and England in 1780-81. From the latter date the course of his life, up to his death in 1813, is fairly well known, though somewhat disguised by his efforts to conceal his exact residence during the worst times of the French Revolution. The original of his letter to President Stiles of Yale, asking the freedom of the city of New Haven for his titled French friends, and for Target and Lacretelle, his literary sponsor in Paris, is among the manuscripts of this Society, and may be reproduced, to show St. John's singular use of English and orthography, while French Consul at New York. This document was given to the Society about a century ago, by the son-in-law of

Dr. Stiles, Caleb Gannett, but seems to have been unknown to Mr. Winthrop, when he wrote his brief paper on St. John in 1874.

Lately a new source of information about St. John has been accidentally opened to American inquirers by a letter from M. Henri Cluzant, a landed proprietor in the Gironde, living at the Château de Cabazac but owning some share, now or formerly, in the old estate of Cagny, near Caen in Normandy, the province of St. John's birth. William Alexander, the older son of St. John, had married in 1798 Narcisse de Mesnage de Cagny, and after his early death his widow resided in the family home at Cagny, where her father-in-law often visited her. He seems to have sent her from Munich, where he long resided, or to have left in her care, many of his manuscripts, drawings and engravings, which were never reclaimed by his descendants now living in Paris, but remained in the old château. By descent from a sister of Mme. Ally de Crèveœur (apparently), M. Cluzant, in no way related to the Crèveœurs, has come into possession of these documents, which, in a letter to the librarian of Harvard University, he seemed to offer to Americans who might be interested in the residence and researches of St. John de Crèveœur. This letter being referred to me, I saw at once the value of this find, and suggested to Professor Trent that it might be acquired for Columbia University. He has since been corresponding, as I have, with M. Cluzant, in the hope that these papers and sketches may come to America.

Altogether the way seems open for a full account of one of the most interesting of the many Frenchmen who have temporarily resided in this country. His correspondence, which was incessant and gossiping, as well as concerned with important matters, social and historical, still exists in France and this country, and throws much light on a period of colonial history wherein we were not well informed before. His relation to the Revolutionary founders of our nation, Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Madison, the Livingstons, etc., is a feature of his life not sufficiently known as yet; and his earlier relations with the New York loyalists (of whom for some years he seems to have been one) add to the value of his writings. His disguises of name and date and residence seem to have been harmless, though vexatious to his readers, and his char-

acter and experiences are worthy of the praise and the attention which they are again beginning to receive after the silence of nearly a century.

Remarks were made during the meeting by the PRESIDENT, and Messrs. FORD, RANTOUL, SANBORN, DAVIS and MEAD.